

DIGITAL AND STREAMING STANDARDS, THE SCOPE OF RESPONSIBILITY

This document was originally published as part of IMPALA's IMPACTS Standards Report in 2023 and is updated according to relevant developments in the area. (Updated in May 2025 and March 2026)

Standardising the sector's approach on streaming is vital. The IMPALA Climate analysis group and Sustainability Task Force reviewed the whole chain and reached a key set of conclusions related to the scope of responsibility concerning digital distribution by DSPs and fans, as well as delivery to DSPs*. This standard also covers more general action across the whole chain as labels are encouraged to use their influence.

Emissions from downstream digital distribution through Digital Service Providers (DSPs) and consumption by fans through streaming services or digital download - these emissions are excluded from the Greenhouse Gas inventories of labels for the following reasons:

- Scope of responsibility - labels do not own or control DSPs which are the responsibility of third parties who are already taking responsibility for the relevant emissions.
- Influence - record companies have no direct control over the distribution of digital files once they have been distributed to DSPs, or influence over emission reduction programmes.
- Data - due to a lack of available data, it's not possible for the recorded sector to estimate with accuracy the size of emissions from digital distribution. The necessary data is controlled by DSPs and their downstream partners. Some DSPs are working towards gathering data from their operations and are establishing emissions calculation methodologies. We refer to this as availability of data as part of the GHG protocol, but as noted above, scope of responsibility and lack of influence means that DSP emissions (including subscriber emissions) are not counted as record company emissions. (This is the same as for other downstream areas of activity in the music market, such as physical retail.)
- Use of sold products - similarly to physical products, digital audio and video requires a secondary device to "use" the product (i.e. to listen or watch content). Therefore, emissions associated with digital audio and video usage can be classified as indirect emissions in alignment with the GHG Protocol.

Emissions related to delivery to DSPs and other emissions up to the point of operational control by a DSP - these are included in the GHG inventories of labels:

Until the point at which music is in the operational control of DSPs, a label is responsible. This includes emissions generated from the moment of production, storage, and the digital delivery of files to DSPs.

This covers all cloud services purchased or controlled by the label to facilitate the creation and movement of music files.

Action across the whole chain - labels should use their influence:

Digital distribution is a vital part of our industry and makes up a significant portion of income for our members. Regardless of carbon accounting boundaries, labels should use their influence to work with the whole industry, including DSPs, to reduce digital impacts. IMPALA is therefore working closely with DSPs to encourage greater transparency and will support all work towards measuring and reducing the impact of streaming. Following IMPALA's Climate Charter, and as part of the Music Climate Pact, IMPALA calls on DSPs to work collaboratively to share data and knowledge on this issue.

To measure label operations emissions, members of IMPALA can use their [free carbon calculator powered by Julie's Bicycle and supported by Merlin and Murmur](#), see more in [IMPALA's sustainability resources](#) which also has advice on reducing emissions, climate investments, the business case for taking action and more.

**This approach to a label's responsibility for digital emissions, as agreed by the IMPALA Sustainability Task Force, is aligned with the Music Climate Collective (MICC) Recorded Music Industry Scope 3 Guidance (2025).*